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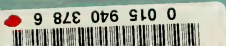
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The Ballad of the Broom:

A Political Satire

BY
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STATE HISTORIAN



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The Ballad of the Broom: A Political Satire

By LUCIAN LAMAR KNIGHT

If ye wish an hour's diversion, then, Georgians, young and old,
Come, gather around the camp-fire, while I a tale unfold:

There was once a little Governor, who owned a famous broom,
With the which to clean the capitol—to sweep out every room.

From the moon-shine on the mountains, to the bar beside the blue,
He announced at every cross-roads: "Now, behold, what I will do!"

He forgot the well-known adage, that, alas, there's many a slip,
'Twixt the cup upon the counter, and the drinker's thirsty lip.

And another thing he overlooked: that, in every noble fight,
If we vow to keep our pledges, we must always pledge the right.

It was down in good old Georgia where the Ku Klux wear the sheet
And 'tis said that with the clansmen he was well-inclined to meet,

Till, en route to re-election, he beheld a dazzling light,
And, like the great Saul of Tarsus, was converted in a night.

But, arise! We must not linger on the old Damascus road,
For the Governor's broom's the subject of this brief memorial ode.

Well, he tried his best to use it, but somehow it wouldn't sweep,—
Like the patriarchs of the Penteteuch, it softly fell on sleep.

Ah, how many hopes lie withered, over which the world has wept!—
Now, that broom is in the museum, where the curios are kept.

But the story of its passing is a romance rich and rare,
One, unmatched since Halley's comet swept the commons of the air.

Well, on coming to the Governorship, he staged a grand-stand play,
And 'twill long, long be remembered—that inauguration day.

Then, some later—"a la Wilson"—like the whale who swallowed Jonah,
He did belly forth his message, aye, "in propria persona".

Have you ever seen a rooster, at a rural poultry show—
What a rise there is in feathers, when the bird begins to crow?

Have you ever seen a bantam strut—ye men who live in town?
Well, Tom's got the barn-yard beaten—he can strut a-sittin' down.

It was killing!—how he pawed the air and how he shook the clods,
If Olympus could have seen him, 'twould have tickled all the gods.

With his eye-glass ribbons dangling down, upon his portly breast,
He re-called to mind the statesmen who have long since gone to rest.

But the real source of merriment, we tarry here to state,
Was to think how well the Little could impersonate the Great.

"First, I'll raid the grand old archives—I will butcher needless facts,
"For, a real State Historian, to me, of danger smacks.

"And besides, I must admit it, in this good old Empire State,
"It will cook my goose forever, if he keeps the records straight.

"Yes, I dread the Truth of History, and, in truth, 'tis my conviction,
"That, to gild my dark biography, I need a Star of Fiction.

"For I comforted the Kaiser when our country was at war
"And I helped to queer old Wilson and to paralyze his paw.

"I refused to be a rubber stamp to that old freak of nature,
"But I'd put a yoke of Egypt on the Georgia Legislature!

"From the patriot's code of ethics I did make a distant journey,
"To become, when things were still red hot, the Soviet's paid attorney.

"I'd deny the whole indictment, but the sleuth is on my track,
"And a thousand things behind me, now, like echoes, 'answer back.

"Yes, the State Historian's dangerous—cold rigors o'er me steal,
"For, in plain old Anglo-Saxon, he has skinned me like an eel."

Shame! A Satyr mock Hyperion! That were fitter far, O Muse,
Than to hear one slander Wilson, when he cannot latch his shoes!

But when Hardwick's day is over—when its butter-flies have flown—
And bedraggled lie the laurels which its wing-ed hours have worn,

He, the man whom he traduces, in the white courts of the sun,
Will o'ertop the tallest cedar, on the Syrian Lebanon.

Now, the State Historian's office,—O, the humor's simply great—
Draws the smallest sum of money on the pay-roll of the State.

But it's usefulness to Georgia, in vast multiples untold,
Is worth all the nuggets hidden in the Spaniard's hills of gold.

'Tis for him, at Memory's altar, to revive the wasted flames—
He restores the crumbling head-stones and he brightens all the names.
He's the servant of the commonwealth, whose only crime, forsooth,—
That he feeds the temple-fires of the Everlasting Truth!

But, with fixed determination and with iron-jawed intent,
On abolishing the "sinecure", the Governor's mind was bent.

But, to rescue "Old Mortality", the Solons were enthused,
And to heed the Proclamation, they out and out refused.

"Wait, I'll tree the 'possum! I will send, as sure as I'm elected,
"To Chicago, where no love for us has ever been suspected.

“There, I’ll get a man called Frederick, in soft accents smoothly polished
“To explain to Cracker simpletons what ought to be abolished.

“Yes, I’ll send to that far section, whence the blue battalions came,
“Which, in sixty-four, enswarthed us, in a winding-sheet of flame.

“Then, I’ll take my little broomlet, and I’ll lift Pandora’s lid
“And I’ll steal a march through Georgia, like my friend Tecumseh did.

“It will serve a double purpose, for I’m out of ready cash
“And I miss my Soviet rubles for to make the second dash.

“On the eve of an election-time and with an empty till,
“It will be a feat of finance for the State to foot the bill.

So the engineer came to us—came, from out the West afar,
Aye, and up the steps he mounted, like a brave young Lochinvar,

Now, the paid-guest of the Governor, he lengthened out his stay
And of all the state-house spaces, he did make a grand survey

Hold, there seems to be an error here! That statement might have fitted.
But the governor’s own department was from Freddy’s list omitted.

“Politics!” in rage, the House declared. “Bunkum!” the Senate hinted,
And they both ignored the document;—it wasn’t even printed.

O, it made the little Hamlet mad! But what was he to do?—
He was check-reined by the Solons, who could read him through and
through.

Now, the end of Frederick’s visit—it’s the safest sort of bet—
Was to catch the State Historian in his fowler’s little net

Though the purpose of the office which the State Historian fills
Is to light the eternal highways, like a beacon on the hills.

Though it’s but the merest pittance which to him the office brings,
He’s the constituted guardian of the State’s immortal things.

One, whose task in serving Georgia—as a true knight serves his queen,
Is to guard her precious heir-looms and to keep her garlands green.

As a true priest serves his altar—is to fan the Living Spark
And, for aye, to shield inviolate, her incense and her ark.

Yes, 'twas kenned what Thomas wanted—just an expert's little fib—
For, the ox his owner knoweth and the ass his master's crib.

“Tut, who cares a rap for records? Bah! Space for them we have not.
“We will dump them on the trash-pile, there to mildew and to rot!”

What did Frederick care for history? Why not a tinker's dam
If, but with a greasy six-pence, he could ease an itching palm.

Why, the arch of Georgia's state-hood, for a modicum of loot,
He would splinter into stove-wood, and supply the match to boot.

What the genius of our statesmen, in the school of time has taught,
What the blood of our fore-fathers, on the battle-field has bought.

What the wisdom of the ages has, through patience, brought to flower,
He would brush aside like cob-webs—for the wages of an hour.

No one can out-tinker Fred'rick;—for a full year's steady pay,
He could over-haul the Pleiads and repair the Milky Way.

And the Lord's Prayer he'd improve upon, in every blessed count,
And he'd fix the Decalogue and mend the Sermon on the Mount.

When he reaches for Orion, to re-line his cap of felt
It will pay the hunter well to watch the buckels on his belt.

In the mad-thirst, born of fever, Fred'rick is a Jack, the Ripper.
He is sure to bale the heavens, if he ever mends the Dipper.

Yes, this expert from Chicago—this factotem out for hire—
If a Nero only fiddled, he would set a Rome on fire.

Fred'rick may escape the hangman, but what bell can toll the fate
Of a Governor who would tomahawk the memories of a State?

Ah, methinks some day his Majesty will prod him out of sleep,
With a broom-stick made of brim-stone, and he'll make the Governor
sweep.

He deserves a re-election! Yes, for with a coup gigantic,
He has kited all the rentals of the Western and Atlantic.

So, upon the poor tax-payer, he must make another call,
For he's robbed the tills of Peter, but to pay the debts of Paul.

It was masterful—heroic—how he stormed the Money Sacks,
With the mooted tax on incomes, when he'd not a sou to tax.

And his stalwart stand for equal rights, we must not fail to note.
He was dead against the women—but, he wants the woman vote.

In his finely-worded platform, he declares for Law and Order,
But a different sort of story comes a-rippling from the Border.

Though renowned in Rhine-lands as the friend of Bill, the German Kaiser,
He's best known to us in Georgia as the great Tax Equalizer.

Why, to hear him talk, the weevil's gone—'tis now a summer's dream,
And, from the old cow, Economy, he's cornered all the cream.

O, it matters not the ailment;—be't a fever or a chill,
There is always balm in Gilead—if we take the Hardwick pill.

Now, the value of a shilling is a thing he's never known,
But the whole wide field of finance, he has deigned to make his own.

He's the State's financial Moses, yea, it's Joshua of command,
Sent, to lead us out of bondage, into Canaan's Better Land.

Yes, Sir Tom's a fiscal wonder—he's to numbers born and bred,
With a master's head for figures, he's a real figure-head.

Like the letter "O", well-rounded, he's a zero bound in buff,
With a mania for ciphering, he's a cipher, sure enough.

Save alone, in tracts of dream-land, not an acre has he bought,
And, according to the digest, his assessment is a naught.

Yet, to read his great state papers, or to hear him 'lectioneer,
He is Georgia's Duke of Dollars, and the State's first financier.

There's a glint of new-coined silver, in the lightning of his glance,
He can run the Bank of England and direct the Bourse of France.

On the world's wide map of finance, he can tell you every creek,
In the market-place of money, he can all the lingo speak.

But, if Rockefeller's fortune were bequeathed to him out-right,
And the gift were made at bed-time, he would lose it over-night.

He is what you call a specialist, and it matters not a fraction—
If a little weak at adding, he's a wizard in subtraction.

Of course, it's not our business, it concerns the Governor most,
But, we'd like for him to tell us what the fatal survey cost.

But here I pause in silence dumb—this is the time to weep
For that smooth report of Fred'rick's work, lies in the vault asleep.

Lies? Yes, lies. Tread gently then, 'twould be a monstrous blunder,
To wake the dead and start to life the Governor's campaign-thunder.

Aye, but that report was honest! Yes, so was Iago's, too,
But it damned poor Desdemona, whom the Moor of Venice slew.

But the rebound of the pendulum told on the guilty fellow
And in blood went down the curtain on the drama of Othello.

That report was Tom's undoing—it bespoke a long vacation,
For the dark-browed Moor of Georgia was to lose his occupation.

Oftimes, to the help of mortals, Wisdom comes, alas, too late,
Only with her pen to point us to the ebb-tide hour of fate.

Only with her wand to warn us of the avenging foe in view
And to tell the doomed Napoleons: "'tis the night of Water-loo!"

O, the swarthy little Samson was a mighty man of power—
He could lift the gates of Gaza and could shake the fortress tower.

With his corded thews, like knots of steel, protruding through his jeans,
He has terrified the Amorites and scared the Phillistines.

With the jaw-bone of an ass, he's slain the lion in his lair,
But his feats of strength are over,—for Delilah's cut his hair.

Well, it's Hardwick scalp that's missing—so we do not give a fig,
If he's got enough of broom-straw, he can wear it for a wig.

But—our thought now turns to Frederick. Whence hath the expert flown?
Like the stubborn ghost of Banquo—this one question will not down.

To Chicago hath he sauntered back, his hungry soul well fed,
While, from Georgia's famished firesides, her children cry for bread.

With the Governor's well-earned "bravo, lad" resounding through his brain
And with Georgia's good tax revenues, to swell his godless gain.

He's back in the grafter's paradise, with golden ducats blest,
Where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.

Hark! now hear ye not the piping of the linnet's tender lay?
If one's ear is keyed to music, he can hear the Governor say:

"What old David was to Jonathan—that Frederick is to me,
"What old Castor was to Pollux—aye, the very same is he.

"What Melanchthon was to Luther, in the world's first Reformation
"He's my very alter ego—and without an alteration.

"What old Friday was to Crusoe, on an island of the ocean,
"That, to me, he's been in ship-wreck, yea, a model of devotion.

"What old Damon was to Pythias, in Friendship's wintry weather,
"I have ever found in Frederick—we are twin souls knit together.

"Should he flitter first to heaven, I hope, in some bright evening star,
"To beclasp his radiant spirit, where the blest immortals are

"In a blaze of fiery splendor, we will hug each other tight,
"And together, arm-entangled, we'll forever roam the night."

Well, to us down here in Georgia, who are under Time's dominion,
In regard to Frederick's spirit, there's a difference of opinion.

Should he e'er return, to welcome him, grim doors and windows wait,
With a uniform to match them, and he'll be our guest of state.

And we'll quarter him where Debs and Morse and other noted men,
Not excepting Julian Hawthorne—have immortalized our "Pen."

But the act which caused that survey was an arbitrary thing,
One which summons back to memory an old Star-Chamber King,

For whose bold career, high-handed, a base tyrant's blood was shed,
And, upon the block at Whitehall, there was cleaved a Stuart's head.

There was not a thing to justify it—it was usurpation rank
And, for God's sure hour of reckoning, he has himself to thank.

Aye, we style ourselves a commonwealth, untaught to bend the knee,
But—we cannot scan that picture and proclaim the old state free.

Come, let's chain our mountain eagle, or else clip his glorious wings,
Aye, and from a race of manikins, ordain a line of kings.

But oppression cannot prosper—wrong forever stands accurst,
And, to Hardwick, Georgia's warning is: "Remember Charles the First."

O, the mystery of it all! The laughing irony of Fate!
That a Tom Thumb—yea, a Gulliver—should rule an Empire State!

Once, in the great halls of Congress, when Champ Clark was on the floor,
To his feet Tom rose a-bristling, for he something wished to know.

But, to Hardwick's interruption, the great man's repartee,
With a look which simply squelched him, was "Shoo-fly, don't bother me!"

Well, the House to roaring merriment was in a moment set,
With an earth-quake peal of laughter, and the walls are laughing yet.

Lo, how have the mighty fallen! and O, Georgia what a stoop!
That you now bring forth a Hardwick where of old you bore a Troup!

Pray, how did he get the Governorship? O, Muse, our ears regale!
Why, the tortoise ran the gauntlet on Br'er Watson's bushy tail.

With a voice whose tones remind us of an old hand-organ turned,
His refrain is "Out for Business" and "Politics Adjourned."

But politics with him adjourned? 'Tis but a crude device
For it covers him all over like the thing called "Beggars' Lice."

Why he politicks at mid-night and he politicks at noon,
And to politics forever will his fiddle be in tune—

Till the earth is changed to charcoal and the sea to fire is turned
And, to Gabriel's "sine die," all creation stands adjourned!

Well, since this was writ, election-day has once more come about,
To explain what brooms were meant for—'twas to hustle Governors out.

Tom, the wielder of the broom-stick, by stern retribution's law,
Caught, now finds his own extremities entangled in the straw.

He's the only one I know of, and I say it without feelin',
Since the broom began to operate, whose heels have hit the ceilin'.

Yes, upraised upon his own petard, the Governor's lifted high
And with Politics he's now prepared to teach Astronomy.

Truth, at last, to triumph comes elate, when all the sands are sifted—
On the scaffold meant for Mordecai, 'twas Haman who was lifted.

Yes, unharmed the grand old archives, which he madly sought to wreck—
Yes, unharmed the State Historian—he's on the upper deck.

Hip, hurrah! The old department's spared! Unloose the festive horn,
When the Governor sleeps at Sandersville, 'twill still go marching on!

Raise a broom-stick for his monument, and on its lifted staff,
Let this valedictory be enscribed: Our Governor's epitaph—

"I have swept full many a field, but now, behold of me the last.

"For, like Thor, I've ceased to thunder, and like Arthur, I have passed.

"Now, farewell ye vales of discontent!—welcome ye halls of doom!

"For, I'm broke—without a dollar—but I leave the world a broom!"

NOTE—On Oct. 3, 1922, Gov. Hardwick appointed Mrs. Wm. H. Felton, of Cartersville, Ga., to succeed the late Thomas E. Watson, in the Senate of the United States. It was an ad interim appointment, pending an election to fill the unexpired term, and was made during a recess of Congress, and after a previous tender of the office to Mrs. Watson, which the latter declined. Before the Senate can meet in December the vacancy will be filled by election, and Gov. Hardwick is himself a candidate for the vacant seat. It is to be regretted, therefore, that Mrs. Felton will not be given an opportunity for real service and that, to this extent, the honor is an empty one; but the appointment has nevertheless been received with universal favor. It is the finest thing yet done by Gov. Hardwick; and, whatever he may have hoped to gain in making the appointment, it can certainly do him no harm. Mrs. Felton is "Georgia's grand old woman", and, at the age of eighty-seven, is the first woman, under our Federal system of government, to wear the toga of the American House of Peers. It is equally a distinction both to Georgia and to Mrs. Felton.



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